

Can botulism be prevented?

Foodborne botulism can be prevented. Most foodborne botulism comes from home canning foods with low acid content, like green beans, beets, asparagus and corn. People who do home canning should follow good hygiene rules to reduce spoilage of foods. If you eat home-canned foods, you should boil the food for 10 minutes before eating it to ensure safety. You can learn about safe home canning of foods online at www.USDA Home Canning Guide.

Botulism can also be found in honey. Because babies' digestive systems are not fully developed, they are at risk for botulism infection. Do not give honey to children less than one year old.

Wound botulism can be prevented by quickly seeking medical care for infected wounds and not using injectable street drugs like heroin.

How can I learn more about botulism?

You can call the **Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's Public Health Hot Topic** telephone line at **1-866-866-2769**, or **TTY 1-800-735-2258**.

You can also find information at these Web sites:

Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
www.dhmh.state.md.us

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/smallpox



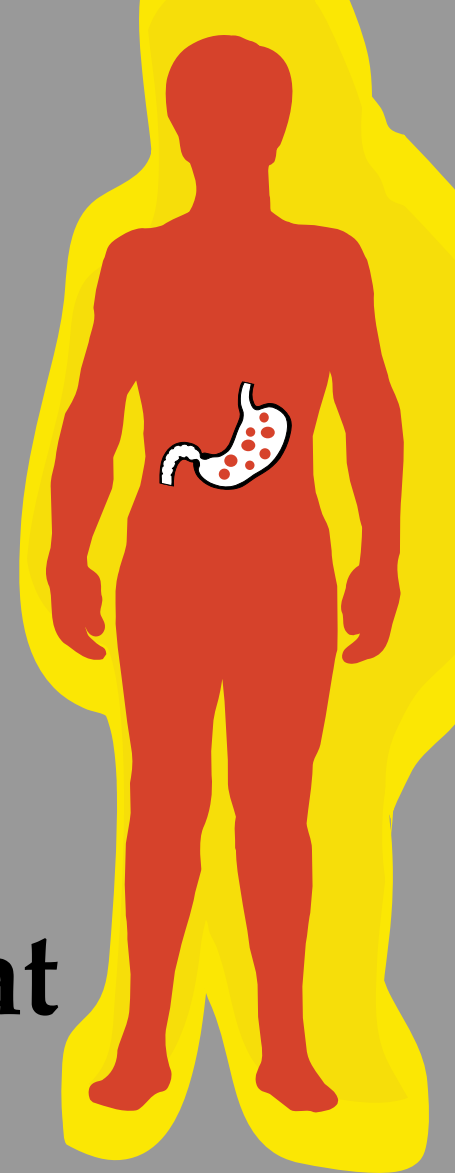
Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

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Botulism - English - A



What is Botulism?

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Botulism is a rare and deadly illness that can cause muscle paralysis or death from breathing (respiratory) failure. There are three kinds of botulism:

- **Foodborne botulism** is caused by eating food tainted with the botulism toxin.
- **Wound botulism** happens when a wound becomes infected with a toxin found in the soil.
- **Infant botulism** happens when babies eat the toxin, which then grows inside the stomach.

Foodborne botulism is very dangerous because many people can become sick from eating the same tainted food. Outbreaks of botulism involving two or more people are often caused by home-canned foods. This happens when the food is not preserved properly.

What are the signs of botulism?

The signs of botulism include:

- blurred or double vision
- slurred speech
- a hard time swallowing
- dry mouth
- muscle weakness

Babies with botulism can seem tired, have a loss of appetite, a weak cry, or be constipated.

These are all signs of the muscle paralysis caused by the toxin. If left untreated, the arms, legs or chest muscles can become paralyzed.

Signs of foodborne botulism can appear as early as six hours after eating or as much as ten days later.

Can botulism be treated?

Yes. If caught early, foodborne and wound botulism can be treated with an antitoxin drug. The drug stops the poison from going through the bloodstream. This can keep the illness from getting worse, but recovery still takes many weeks. Antitoxin is not normally used to treat infant botulism. If the botulism case is severe, the patient may need a ventilator to help them breathe. After a few weeks the paralysis slowly improves.

With foodborne botulism, doctors may try to cause vomiting or give the patient enemas to remove tainted food from the body. Wound botulism may need surgery to remove the source of the bacteria.

In some cases, patients with severe botulism may have shortness of breath and tiredness for years. Sometimes, long-term therapy will be needed to help recovery. Over the last 50 years, the number of people who die from botulism has dropped from 50% to 8%.